

SOLANO COUNTY WATER AGENCY



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August 20, 1997

Lester Snow, Executive Director
CALFED Bay-Delta Program
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1155
Sacramento, Ca. 95814

Dear Mr. Snow:

This letter is to provide some initial comments on the Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan Volume II (review draft July 28, 1997). We will be providing additional technical comments during the 45 day review period but I thought it was important for me to give you some general initial comments at this time.

My comments are on the Yolo Basin Ecological Zone which includes Putah Creek. The Solano Project, the main water supply for Solano County, dams Putah Creek forming Lake Berryessa. The Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan suggests making Putah Creek into a self-sustaining salmon and steelhead fishery.

Putah Creek has never supported a significant, self sustaining population of anadromous salmonids. Historically, anadromous salmonids have been observed, but in very low numbers and generally only in wet years. Habitat conditions have always been and continue to be only marginally suitable. While it is technically possible to create suitable habitat conditions, the situation is analogous to farming on marginal land or constructing a wetland in the middle of the desert - it can be done, but requires continuous, substantial effort to do so.

Much of the problem can be attributed to the physical characteristics of the Putah Creek channel, which make it exceedingly difficult to create the typical anadromous salmonid habitat associated with gravel-bed rivers and streams. All 22 miles of Putah Creek, downstream of the Putah Diversion Dam, is, with the exception of a two-mile-long segment immediately downstream of the Diversion Dam, deeply incised in dense silty clay material. The principal source of gravel is not the adjacent channel banks or tributaries (there are no significant tributaries entering Putah creek downstream of Winters, which is located 20 miles upstream of the Yolo Bypass), but instead, the so called "gravel reach" located in the two-mile-long segment between the Diversion Dam and Winters. Gravel "patches" are located downstream of Winters, but these patches are for the most part very small and highly susceptible to scouring and downstream transport.

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Also lacking in Putah Creek, downstream of the Diversion Dam, is the typical "pool-riffle-run" sequence associated with gravel-bed rivers and streams. Channel gradients are very low, as would be expected in a stream traversing the flat agricultural lands of the Sacramento Valley. Approximately 90 percent of the 22-mile-long channel, downstream of the Diversion Dam, consists of large pools; many of which range from 20 to 40 feet in width, 500 to over 3000 feet long, and four to over ten feet deep. Even in the gravel reach, the majority of the habitat consists of open water pools. Not surprisingly, stream flows move comparatively slow and quickly warm to ambient air temperatures.

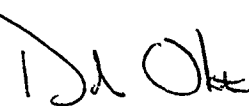
Putah Creek has always been, and at least for the 22-mile-long segment downstream of the Putah Diversion Dam, continues to be a warm water fishery. While some anadromous salmonid habitat could be created, it would be highly artificial and would require substantial resources that would be more productively used elsewhere, where the physical conditions are more amenable to the creation of anadromous salmonid habitat.

My understanding of the Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan is that it is a compilation of projects and ideas from a variety of sources. Inclusion in the Plan does not necessarily mean that the program is viable or would be funded. However, I would expect the Plan to give a much better indication about the sources of information and the uncertainties with some of the recommended programs, such as those for Putah Creek. Clearly the record and literature does not support such a strong recommendation for a salmon and steelhead fishery in Putah Creek.

My understanding that other agencies within the Ecosystem Restoration zones have similar concerns to mine about the Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan. We are all concerned about such a widely circulated document containing information that is incomplete and in some cases inaccurate. I hope that after you receive comments from interested parties that Volume II will be withdrawn and revised to reflect the true feasibility of the projects being considered.

We, and I am sure others, would be happy to provide you with any technical information you might need to improve the Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan. If you have any questions please contact me at 707-451-2904.

Sincerely,



David Okita
General Manager

cc: Dick Daniels, CALFED Bay-Delta Program

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